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THE JAMES FOUNTAIN

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THE JAMES FOUNTAIN



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THE JAMES FOUNTAIN

THE PROCEEDINGS AT THE PRESENTATION

UNION SQUARE, NEW YORK

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1881

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE DISTRIBUTION

NEW YORK
ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH & COMPANY
900 BROADWAY, COR. 20th STREET

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INTRODUCTORY.

THE JAMES FOUNTAIN.

THE project of erecting a Drinking Fountain in one of the public parks of New York City was laid before the Commissioners of Public Parks by Mr. D. Willis James, several years since, and after due deliberation, the Board decided upon the present location on the west side of Union Square.

The gift will, it is hoped, besides ministering to physical comfort, contribute to the artistic wealth of the city, and in its moral import, suggest lessons of kindness and charity. The work was contracted for in Stuttgart, Germany, on the 10th of May, 1877, and the model was executed by Adolf Donndorf, Professor of Sculpture in the Art Academy of that city. The casting was done in the bronze foundry of G. Howaldt, in the City of Brunswick, and the granite was imported from the quarries in Sweden, of which Messrs. Kessel & Röhl, of Berlin, are the proprietors.

Adolf Donndorf, the artist who executed the sculptural work, is a pupil of Ernst Rietschel, who died in the City of Dresden in 1860, and whose fame is chiefly identified with the magnificent memorial

of Martin Luther and the Reformation now standing in Worms. Rietschel had barely completed the general plan of this great work and modelled its central figure when his untimely death removed from earth one of the foremost sculptors of the century.

The task of completing the Luther monument now devolved chiefly upon Rietschel's favorite pupil, Adolf Donndorf, and some of the most important accessory figures of this renowned memorial in bronze are the work of his hand. Prominent among these may be mentioned the "Mourning Magdeburg," the "Savonarola," and "Peter Waldus." These noble statues gave the young artist a European fame, and perhaps no living sculptor is to-day more honored by public commissions than he.

Among his later works the monument to Peter Cornelius, the father of modern German painting, now standing in Düsseldorf, and a noble memorial of Schumann, the composer, in the City of Bonn, are worthy of especial mention.

Professor Donndorf is at present (January, 1882) engaged upon the statues of Bach and Goethe, the latter to be erected in Carlsbad. During a period of four years, with only brief interruptions, he has been occupied upon the simple group of this Drinking Fountain with its accessory decorations, and it is his first introduction to the American public.

THE
CEREMONIES OF PRESENTATION.

SHORTLY after three o'clock on the afternoon of Tuesday, October 25, 1881, a large assemblage had gathered in Union Square to witness the unveiling and presentation of the Fountain.

Among those who occupied positions on the stage at the time of the unveiling were : Mr. D. Willis James; Mayor Grace; Messrs. Lane, Wales, MacLean, and Oliffe, Commissioners of Public Parks; the Rev. Drs. Roswell D. Hitchcock, S. Irenaeus Prime, Charles F. Adams, J. P. Newman, Howard Crosby; Professor J. Leonard Corning, John A. Hamersly, William MacLeod, curator of the Corcoran Art Gallery at Washington, and Messrs. Morris K. Jesup, William E. Dodge, Jr., Henry E. Pellew, James A. Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, Royal Phelps, Charles L. Brace, Robert Hoe, Jr., John S. Kennedy, and Robert

Vaux. The ceremonies were presided over by Park Commissioner Smith E. Lane, who, with his associates, escorted the Mayor and the speakers to seats upon the platform. Mr. Lane called the assembly to order, and then spoke as follows:

ADDRESS OF
MR. COMMISSIONER LANE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—In ancient and in modern cities fountains have been characteristic works. They have been the proper works of the State, and when erected by private citizens, these have been ranked among public benefactors. At first they served purposes of utility, but were gradually exalted into works of art. Other fountains we have of various kinds. The one beside us in this park, simple spray thrown over banks of lilies and water plants; others, like the one in front of the City Hall, the one in Madison Square, and that before the Terrace in Central Park, enriched with marble, granite, and bronze. You are about to

see unveiled the first one in this city in which art dominates wholly; thanks to the superior taste and munificence of its donor. You will see the idealized female and childlike form, as it is lifted above its granite base, so also lifted above all utility as a pure work of art. Art is no longer subordinate, but pre-eminent.

Fountains are the emblems of bounty and of plenty. We speak of the fountains of life and of wealth, and the idea is always inspiring when it addresses us by the sentiment of the beautiful; and so, hereafter, as in the avocations of life we pass by this beautiful visitor speaking to us this language, let us thank the man who, through future generations, will thus add daily to the happiness of his fellow-citizens.

This is another donation to the city from one person, and is a signal example to his class; that class of noble public benefactors who do not belong to ancient lineage, to the Church or to the State, but whom Providence keeps up in an unbroken succession.

I have now the honor to present to you the donor, Mr. D. Willis James.

PRESENTATION ADDRESS OF
MR. JAMES.

MR. PRESIDENT, MR. MAYOR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—A considerable number of years ago my valued friend, whose memory will ever be fragrant in this community—the late Theodore Roosevelt—and I had planned to unite in presenting to the City of New York a Bronze Drinking Fountain, believing that it would have a useful and beneficent ministry. His lamented death prevented the execution of our plans.

After long and unlooked-for delays, the privilege of bringing to completion the plan then formed is given to me to-day.

If, Mr. President, the Bronze now to be uncovered shall give to any citizen any part of the pleasure it has given to me to have it prepared, and especially if it shall be the means of kindling in any heart that spirit of Love—Charity—it is intended to illustrate, I shall indeed be more than compensated.

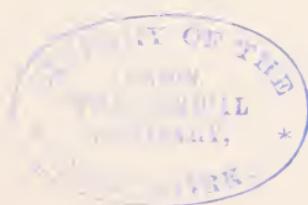
Mr. Mayor, as the official representative of

the City of New York, I beg to tender to you my grateful thanks for the privilege of presenting this Fountain now to be unveiled.

The Fountain was then unveiled by Professor Corning, and the gift accepted in behalf of the city by His Honor the Mayor.

ADDRESS OF
M A Y O R G R A C E.

Permit me, sir, in the name of the City of New York, to accept at your hands this Fountain, the usefulness of which we lose sight of in contemplating its rare beauty. Much as the city must prize your gift, it must prize still more the spirit in which it is given; for it betokens a pride of city which grows out of loving citizenship, and which would see New York as rich in art treasures as any city in the world. We no longer drink spring-water out of beechen cups, but whoever comes to this Fountain will, I trust, find the water, not less, but more, sweet, forasmuch as it is drunk in the presence of a



genuine work of art which has been given to our city by a man who loves our city.

Your benevolence has not stopped here, however. The city is, in my opinion, still more deeply indebted to you than for this evidence of your public-spiritedness. We have to thank you for having erected in the upper part of the city, in conjunction with other liberal gentlemen, a row of model tenement-houses, which afford comfortable and healthy homes to the poor, at the same time that they return an honest and sufficient revenue for the money invested. A work of this latter kind is a work of true benevolence as contra-distinguished from charity, for the recipients of its benefits are not put in a position of humiliation, but are permitted to retain their self-respect and independence by paying an honest price for what they get. The merit of the undertaking is, that it affords an honest article, which the great mass of our tenements are not, at an honest rate. This I regard as a most meritorious work, and while in the name of the city I thank the generous donor for this Fountain which beautifies our park, I cannot refrain from thanking him, now that I have the

opportunity, for his other and better gift to the city, for such I consider the tenement-houses which afford not only inhabitable, but comfortable homes for the class which make up the great body of our citizens.

Professor Corning, of Morristown, N. J., was then introduced, and spoke as follows :

ADDRESS OF
PROFESSOR CORNING.

This late autumnal day brings desires and hopes long deferred to happy fruitage, and we all give thanks to the kind Providence which has spared the donor of this beautiful offering to witness its dedication to the public good, not alone for the present, but for coming generations.

Unlike a great multitude of conceptions in the world of artistic symbolism, the work before us requires no explanation. As every art creation ought to, which is intended for popular use

and culture, it tells its own story, which “he that runs may read.”

For ages art has chosen the motherly instinct made visible as the emblem of charity, and it will not tire of this medium of revelation and inspiration to the end of time.

The simple group which surmounts this contribution to the physical comfort of the people, claims, then, no originality in its conception, but takes its modest place in a long succession of apostleship honored by ancient traditions and approved by the verdict of mankind. As a work of art it must slowly find its rank at the tribunal of impartial criticism; but as a silent preacher of the institutes of Christian kindness and love, reaching out to humanity with motherly regard, and conducting thirsty souls to fountains of refreshment, it challenges instant and enduring admiration.

Just these few words, and no more, concerning the moral significance and worth of the gift which we dedicate to-day. And now for the brief moments which have been kindly granted me, how can one better serve his audience and the occasion than by telling the story of its

passage from the brain and heart of the donor to its present destination?

Nearly five years have elapsed since a little company of us, three in number—the most important two thirds being the donor and his wife—chanced to meet in a German hotel, and under the leadership of one of the trio, whose modest words we have just listened to, the conversation turned upon the project of a drinking-fountain which should realize the threefold intent of contributing to the physical comfort of the people, and at the same time teaching a lesson of religion and cultivating a healthy appreciation of art. Not many days subsequently the members of this little conference separated, the most important two thirds emigrating to the south of France for a winter's sojourn, and the residual fraction remaining in the city of Stuttgart. In this beautiful capital of the little kingdom of Würtemberg resides Professor Wilhelm von Lübke, well known all over Europe, and America likewise, as the most popular of living historians of art, a critic as well, whose judgment in his department is nearly supreme at the Swabian court. In the perplexities

naturally accompanying the practical solution of the question, this was a fortunate circumstance, and by permission of him who had most right to control, the counsel of the learned professor, as well as that of Dr. Hemsen, private librarian of the King of Würtemberg, was sought.

Upon the first visit to Professor Lübke's study a stranger was encountered, whose presence proved to be another fortunate link in the chain of circumstances leading to the happy conclusion which we welcome to-day. This was none other than Professor Adolf Donndorf, lately arrived from Dresden, and just then installed as head of the department of sculpture in the Art Academy of Stuttgart. "Right here is the man you are looking for," said Professor Lübke; and in a few moments' conversation it was settled that the young artist, who completed the Luther Monument at Worms after the death of the great Rietschel, should make a little model in clay of a drinking-fountain, and that a photograph of it should be sent to the south of France for inspection by two pairs of eyes belonging to the authoritative members of the first conference.

In a few days a small model of the upper half of the sculptural work was completed, and a picture of it sent to the proper quarter for approval. A plan of the bronze postament and the granite pedestal followed, and after a protracted correspondence concerning questions of minor detail, the contract was signed in Stuttgart on the 10th of May, 1877, before the American consul resident in that city.

The little clay model had already been exhibited in the annual exposition of the Art Academy in the Swabian capital, and the probable destination of the completed work had been announced in the public press of Germany. Two and a half years was the period within which the artist contracted that his work should be ready for erection. But, like many another work which has been the fruit of conscientious toil rather than mercenary ambition, it lingered long beyond the allotted time, and thus fulfilled a moral mission superadded to its intended one, bringing, to wit, a large discipline of exemplary patience and faith.

It would have been easy for the sculptor, laboring merely as a hireling, to have fulfilled

the letter of his obligation in half the contracted period. Art studios largely favored with popular patronage not seldom degenerate into mere factories, in which dispatch and pecuniary profit are manifestly the ends chiefly sought. And surely, if ever haste and superficiality might be pardoned, it would be in a composition like the one before us, designed for outdoor exposition, and never for close scrutiny. But our artist disclaimed such unworthy aims and methods with the most explicit assurance, and through all these years of weary waiting has repeatedly declared his intention to execute a work which, for truth to nature and conscientious attention to detail, should be as fit for a museum as for a public park. How truly he has kept his pledge the critical public will judge. I speak, however, from personal knowledge when I say that every single figure in the group before us represents a living model, whose presence was summoned to Professor Donndorf's atelier day after day for successive months ; not, let it be understood, for literal facial portraiture, which was never intended, but for unerring guidance in the reproduction of form and attitude.

I am not aware of any violation of confidence in informing you that the sculptor's own wife and child stood for this bronze mother with the baby on her arm. It is true that the original model of the baby outgrew his proper size before the clay group was finished. But a numerous generation of little Donndorfs has been coming upon the stage in normal procession for some years; and when the first model for the baby in arms had got into pantalets, there was another live specimen at hand whose dimensions were exactly right. As to the other little one running by the mother's side, I happen to know that a city of nearly a hundred thousand inhabitants was searched for a model of comeliness and faultless anatomy. A little boy of fortunate parentage, who had in the city of Stuttgart a neighborhood fame for ideal grace of form, stood for this third member of the group before us. I could tell the name of this youthful aspirant for immortality in bronze, now a compeer with Alexander the Great and St. Peter and Marcus Aurelius, and a multitude of other grand personages of history, but it is full of jaw-breaking consonants; and besides this, the

permission of the little proprietor of the consonants has not been obtained.

The pilgrimage of this comely group from clay to bronze has been, like the journey of human life, marked by vicissitude and trial. Its checkered career would materially contribute to lengthen the column of accidents in the daily gazette. Nearly two years ago, for example, when we were looking for a report of the approaching transportation of the plaster model to the foundry, the fact reluctantly leaked out that the giving way of an iron support had caused a serious break in the principal figure, which would delay the casting several months. But an almost fatal catastrophe was yet to come. The winter of 1879-80 was one of unprecedented severity in Stuttgart, the mercury going down on several occasions below zero—a circumstance almost unheard of in the sheltered valley of Neckar. The artist had nearly completed the modelling of the entire group, and was putting on the finishing touches. Leaving his atelier at nightfall, he retired to his home with bright visions of the near fulfillment of his long-cherished hopes.

On that fatal night the winter winds held high carnival in the Swabian capital, and the bitter frost mocked at hickory and anthracite. Fearful of the welfare of his treasures, not yet moulded from moist clay into solid plaster, the ill-starred sculptor hastened in the early morning to his atelier only to find the group, upon which he had expended two years of toil, lying a heap of shapeless lumps and morsels on the floor! Frost, without bar or battle-axe, had been the iconoclast, more merciless than ancient vandals in the halls of the Cæsars. Brave of heart, as is every worthy toiler for the weal of mankind, the artist began his task again, retracing his weary steps, watered, I doubt not, with tears, almost from the very beginning. At last, in the spring of the present year, the polished blocks of this granite pedestal came across the sea from the Swedish quarries, the harbingers of another advent; and while the summer was at its full, a ship, laden with apologies for long procrastination, brought the bronze group and postament to our shores, and the final barrier to the festivities of to-day was removed.

Such, briefly, is the story of the gift which we now gratefully welcome to its place of honor in the heart of the metropolis. I am not here to applaud either the giver or his offering. But it is a solace and a joy to think that, long after the present generation has passed away, this comely work shall stand here, a minister to human need, a teacher in its own degree of artistic truth and grace, and a silent yet eloquent preacher of the institutes and benedictions of Christian charity.

The proceedings closed with the following address by the Rev. Dr. Hitchcock :

ADDRESS OF
D R. H I T C H C O C K.

In Oriental countries, where the summer is six months long, without clouds or rain, natural fountains of cool, sweet water have a value and a charm unknown to us. In the Hebrew language, for example, the word rendered "fountain" in our English Bible means also an "eye."

A fountain like that of Elisha near Jericho, bursting from the earth and sparkling in the sunshine, is more than so much water for men and cattle; it is the eye of the landscape.

Hunger and thirst are our two great appetites; food and drink our two most urgent wants. Thirst, we are told, is not quite so simple, nor quite so easily explained, as hunger. At all events, extreme thirst is harder to bear than extreme hunger. The desert caravan, the wounded soldier, the child burning with fever, know what thirst is, and ask only for water to quench it.

Those of us that were born and brought up in the country will always remember some things. We shall always remember just how the water tasted out of that spring at the foot of the hill, out of that old oaken bucket in grandfather's well. And we shall never need to be told how King David felt when he asked for water from the well of Bethlehem by the gate. And we shall always pity the poor city boys and girls whose first idea of water was of something drawn from a faucet.

It is now close upon forty years since New York began to be proud, and justly proud, of

her Croton aqueduct. Rome, to be sure, had many aqueducts, fourteen at least in all, though not one that equalled ours. To-day it may be well for us to be reminded that we have but one, and have outgrown this one. Not our comfort only, but our safety is now imperilled. Prayer might bring us rain, but no amount of rain that we are likely to get will ever make the Croton River sufficient for our need.

The fountain we dedicate to-day is a benefaction demanding our most grateful acknowledgment. Multitudes will be refreshed by it. Multitudes will be saved by it from resorting to artificial and stimulating drinks. And then, beside all its homelier uses, it is an ornament to the city. As a work of art, of high art, it becomes at once an educator of the public taste. New York is richer, finer, and better for it in many and many ways. I am forbidden to eulogize the giver; but the city will never forget either the giver or the gift.

But this occasion has a wider reach of suggestion and a larger meaning than have yet been named. What we call the social problem is now pressing for solution as never before in hu-

man history. The mutual relations of men, of the ignorant and the instructed, of poor and rich, of labor and capital; above all, the mutual relations of society and individuals, are now undergoing the freest and most radical discussion.

What men have suffered hitherto, and still are suffering, large masses of them, is evident enough and painful enough. But how to help the men we pity without dismeling them to help themselves, how to conserve and advance society without sacrificing the individual, is the one great problem of the hour.

Let us be neither alarmed nor cheated. The present movement toward larger liberty, intelligence, and comfort began in Palestine nearly nineteen hundred years ago. The most radical reformer known in history is the Galilean peasant. The best philanthropy of our age, and of all ages—best, because most sensible and most effective—is simply Christian philanthropy. Under free institutions, equality of condition is no more to be expected than equality of mental endowment. Equality of condition, enforced by legal enactments to-day, will require to be

enforced again, by still more stringent enactments, to-morrow. In the long-run there is no help for us, and no hope, but in the Christian sense of human brotherhood, profoundly felt and wisely exercised.

It is one of the best signs of the times that our men of wealth are becoming so deeply impressed with the sense of stewardship. In this, as in so many other things, New York is leading the continent ; one might almost say is leading the civilization of the age. Her bounty is imperial, and more than imperial. Emperors only give away what others have earned and saved. Our merchant princes are giving away what they have themselves earned and saved. Every dollar bears the stamp of industry and self-denial. Thanks to the merchant princes that have had their day, and have done their work ; hail to the younger merchants, now assuming the burdens of more eventful days, and earning for themselves the same great reward of popular gratitude and affection.





